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The Struggle for Balance:
Repression, Taboo, and the Victorian Monster in the Mirror

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Gather a group of high school or college students together and ask them what can be frightening about mirrors or reflections, and the list that they come up with may prove astoundingly long. Many will have seen the horror film *Candyman*, in which a murdered man is summoned through a mirror to violently avenge his gruesome death. Still others will have heard of a similar legend, Bloody Mary, who can also be summoned through a mirror by repeating her name a number of times in succession, depending on the version of the folktale. Even young children will recognize the monster in the mirror from such tales as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, or Carroll's unsettling mirror-poem "Jabberwocky." From whence did these tales of ghastly mirror images stem?

Surprisingly, despite the era's reputation for critiquing industry and class stereotypes, Victorian authors pioneered this concept of the destructive doppelgänger, which, in turn, led to modern "monster in the mirror" myths. Although legends from ancient Greece to the Brothers Grimm often included mirrors, it was the Victorian Era that truly warped them into the horror trope that we know today. In fact, the mirror monster has not only gained in popularity over the past two centuries, but has served to illustrate surprising similarities between Victorian and contemporary cultures.

When tracing the path from Victorian gothic to contemporary horror, it is important to first discover the motives, methods, and inspiration behind the Victorian authors' extensive use of the mirror image as a horror trope. The example of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* can help shed some light on the function of the mirror in Victorian literature. A demonic character such as Dracula has no soul; he is a primal creature unaffected by any inner struggle between the forces of good and evil. Since his physical body is composed of pure evil, there is no need for the character to hide or repress his

better half. Thus, when Dracula looks into the mirror, there is no chance of him finding a good, kind reflection of his conscience looking back at him. In fact, there is no chance of him finding anything looking back at him. Most Victorian characters, though, are a bit more dimensional than Dracula in terms of morality and ethics. Hence, characters such as Dr. Jekyll and Dorian Gray find themselves engaged in battle with their darker halves. Not every character who encounters a terrifying doppelgänger or mirror monster is a depraved individual, though. One of the most beloved children's book characters of all time, Lewis Carroll's Alice, faced her share of monsters and malevolent counterparts as well. Still, despite differences in age, gender, class, and so on, characters who look in the mirror and find monsters looking back share a number of common bonds: fear, repression, and taboo. As we shall see, individuals from the Victorian Era to today have expressed an intense fear of the unknown, and have routinely tried or been forced to repress the thoughts and actions that they fear the most. What is more, individual anxieties have been heightened since the nineteenth century because of socially-imposed expectations and taboo. Often, characters such as Alice and Dorian Gray are successful in banishing their darker halves only until they gaze into a mirror or other reflective surface (in Dorian's case, his portrait). While doing so, they are able to see themselves from another perspective, and are free to ascribe any darker impulses to their doppelgängers. Ultimately, individuals who find themselves encountering a mirror monster are not monsters themselves, but are simply searching for a sense of balance and unity.

What could have caused the sudden Victorian obsession with reflection that we see represented throughout nineteenth-century literature? Beginning with the example of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, we can pinpoint a pair of important causes

inherent in Victorian society. Many factors influenced Wilde to construct perhaps the epitome of protagonist-doppelgänger relationships between Dorian and his portrait, but the foremost reason behind his creation may have been Wilde's natural satirical view of his fellow Victorians and their strong interest in aestheticism. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wilde mocked the Victorian sense of earnestness not because it represented a quaint, old-fashioned notion, but because so many of the early Victorians who professed and preached earnestness were either duplicitous or hopelessly repressed. This idea of repression would be explored more thoroughly in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and brings to mind the second reason why Wilde used the mirror image to instill horror in the Victorian community. At the time that he was writing, Wilde could not help but be influenced by the number of psychological and philosophical theories on duality and repression put forth by such thinkers as Sigmund Freud. As contemporary filmmakers capitalize on the prevailing fears of their contemporary audiences, Oscar Wilde capitalized on the fears that such new, radical thinking raised in the Victorians. This fear, according to philosopher Otto Rank was essentially "the pathological fear of one's self, often leading to paranoid insanity and appearing personified in the pursuing shadow, mirror-image, or double" (Rank 85-86).

It is no coincidence that the mirror image often became a personification of the self's darker half. Beauty was a vital part of the Victorian literary landscape, due mainly to the Aesthetic Movement, in which writers such as Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater played pivotal roles. Appearance seemed to be key in both fiction and life; a well-dressed, well-spoken individual was a respectable individual. Despite his own devotion to art and appearance, Wilde realized the Aesthetic movement's pitfalls and saw through

this façade. Through a much more scathing method than he would in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the author created a cautionary tale “terrifyingly at odds with the public values of the society that applauds [...] beautiful appearance” (Riquelme 611), and it seems fitting that Wilde should use the mirror image to instill fear in Victorian aesthetes. While the first few chapters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* seem to merely poke fun at the Victorian persona, the satire cuts deeper and deeper as the reflection of the Victorian gentleman shows Dorian and those surrounding him for what they truly are.

In the novel, Wilde portrays most early Victorians as either individuals with shallow personalities or individuals with no personalities at all. Even his more tragic and sympathetic characters fall prey to the author’s critique when he turns “the critical direction [...] inward, toward England” (Riquelme 614). Critic John Paul Riquelme argues that rather than simply write a tale of immense beauty that aestheticians like Pater would have admired, Wilde is able to deftly turn aestheticism against its purveyors and develop a satire that subtly mocked a society obsessed with appearance. Near the beginning of the novel, the three main characters contemplate what would become of Dorian Gray if he were to get caught under the wing of Lord Henry Wotton. Dorian concludes that “[h]e would become dreadful, hideous, and uncouth” (27). While the line is somewhat of a humorous exaggeration, the author’s choice of adjectives reflects the values of a Victorian gentleman like Basil Hallward. Individuals such as this artist who idolizes Dorian may be just as disappointed if Dorian changes in appearance, as if Dorian changes in action – and often, the two changes are linked. For if Dorian were to act in a dreadful or uncouth manner, he would, at the same time, become hideous. Even the naïve Dorian and seemingly sensible Basil find themselves caught up in the early Victorian

idea that physical ugliness is indicative of low, simple nature, and vice versa. In the novel's prologue, Oscar Wilde writes, "All art is at once surface and symbol" (1) – a line of thinking epitomizing the aesthetic ideal. For an example of a critic simply looking at the "surface and symbol" of art, we can reference Walter Pater's review of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In the brief essay, he describes Dorian as "a beautiful creation" and confirms the Victorian concept that "vice and crime make people coarse and ugly" (Pater 265). He even goes so far as to write, in a somewhat disappointed tone, that "there is a certain amount of the intrusion of real life and its sordid aspects" in the novel (264). As a pioneer of aestheticism, Pater was wont to view life as he would a painting, desiring each brushstroke and hue to be just so. Wilde, while an aesthete himself, realized that such complete acceptance of beauty and rejection of ugliness could easily lead to a paradox and, ultimately, a struggle with the shadow self. It is an extension of Pater's purely aesthetic mode of thinking that destroys his counterpart, Basil Hallward.

Despite Hallward's unfortunate end, Sybil Vane is perhaps Wilde's most sympathetic and tragic weapon in this attack on Victorian vapidness. In this character, we see that Wilde's critique is not restricted to the Victorian gentleman, but includes the Victorian lady as well, showing her as more a cipher than an intellectually and ethically developed human being. Note that when Lord Henry asks Dorian, "When is she Sibyl Vane?", Dorian simply replies, "Never" (58). While humorous to some extent, like many of the observations made by Lord Henry, there is an inherent sadness to the concept. Sibyl Vane, like so many others in this novel and in Victorian society, covers herself with a beautiful veil to keep others from seeing her true self, which may not be up to society's expectations. Although Lord Henry is in no way an exemplar of how Wilde believes

individuals should live, the author does seem to agree with his statement, "the costume of the nineteenth century is detestable. It is so sombre, so depressing" (31). Wilde acknowledges, unlike so many early Victorians, that this concept of purity, virtue, and earnestness is often a disguise made to avoid either judgement by fellow members of society or guilt over one's own sins. It seems from the way that the novel satirizes such aesthetes as Walter Pater and Basil Hallward, and such decadents as Lord Henry, that the author is denouncing reliance on art and beauty altogether. However, to turn the other way and only rely on the new, emerging sciences is equally destructive. As Nassaar writes, "Wilde saw human nature in nineteenth-century England as rapidly plummeting from innocence into awareness of the demon universe" (70). This demon universe is often found in a mirror image, which, in the case of Dorian Gray, is his portrait.

When Dorian sees his own aging, warped face in the portrait later in the novel, it is a sign that his repressed mirror image is destroying him. The Victorian refusal to believe in the innate evil, or ugliness, proposed by Wilde is summed up in Dorian's response to Lord Henry's theories: "There is some answer to you, but I cannot find it. Don't speak. Let me think. Or, rather, let me try not to think" (21). This response was not likely a rarity in Wilde's time, during which radical changes in thought had Victorians questioning, or sometimes willfully refusing to question, the darkness that could be lurking in their own souls. It was this question of the soul, and even human origin, that led to *The Picture of Dorian Gray's* "dark dynamics of doubling and reversal" (Riquelme 609). In the novel, Oscar Wilde uses a distorted mirror motif to delve into the depths of men's souls – a place where few wanted to go, for fear of what they might find there. What is most important is that the portrait, which takes on a life of its own, does not

simply appear through the mysticism of a satanic pact. As critic John Paul Riquelme states, "The novel's narrative concerns a dark and darkening recognition that transforms Dorian's life by actualizing a potential that was already there" (610). The fact that the darkness is already there is the fact that many Victorians refused to believe, and perhaps the reason why the events of the novel often seem so horrible. With the dawn of psychological theory came the idea that anyone was capable of the crimes that Dorian committed, and that everyone carries the destructive doppelgänger within them. Wilde, of course, was not the first author to propose this idea. For a full century, readers had been bombarded by the concept of latent primeval forces from Darwin, Stevenson, Stoker, and others. The Victorian Age, for as proper as it seemed on the surface, was haunted by the fear of an inner evil, and the growing presence of psychological theory did little to reassure the Victorians.

The rise of psychology was, of course, precipitated largely by the writings and studies of Sigmund Freud. It was Freud who broached many taboo subjects throughout his life, including those surrounding the Oedipal and Electra complexes. These notions shattered his society's perceptions of gender and sex, but were not the only groundbreaking hypotheses put forth by Freud. The Victorians were also introduced to the ego, the superego, and most frighteningly, the id, which houses the passions. When describing the relationship that an individual's ego has to the id, Freud used the analogy of a horse and rider, writing, "In its relation to the id [the ego] is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse" (Freud 19). Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this concept is the suggestion that the id is more powerful than the ego, and that it has the ability to buck its rider at any time. Once again, individuals living

during the nineteenth century were being told that something uncontrollable, and often quite disturbing, was hiding within themselves. In many ways, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* provided a microcosm of the Victorian reaction to the problem of the id.

Early in the novel, we are privy to Dorian's preliminary thoughts on this new psychological movement: "He began to wonder whether we could ever make psychology so absolute a science that each little spring of life would be revealed to us. As it was, we always misunderstood ourselves and rarely understood others" (Wilde 110). So Dorian begins to move through the stages that his fellow Victorians would in the face of emerging psychology. The first stage, as exemplified in these early thoughts of Dorian, is wonder. Psychology is initially seen as a marvel through which many of life's unexplainable mysteries may be solved. This thought leads to the second stage, soon also personified in Dorian: curiosity. Dorian, like so many of us, seems intrigued by the concept of being able to trace the roots of emotions and actions to their psychological causes. In addition, Dorian has a bit of the psychologist in him, taking an interest in watching the experiment as it unfolds, even if this experiment involves his own soul. Upon discovering the first changes in his portrait, Dorian muses, "For there would be a real pleasure in watching it. He would be able to follow his mind into its secret places. This portrait would be to him the most of mirrors. As it had revealed to him his own body, so it would reveal to him his own soul" (110). Of course, Dorian does not have the intrinsic dread that modern readers have of mystical mirrors. After all, he is one of the sources of our dread, but one source of *his* trouble is the id (or as Jung would later offer, the shadow) that he unleashes. Perhaps too taken up by the possibilities of his

experiment, Dorian, like so many other scientists, feels the need to push the limits. How much can he change his portrait, and how dark can his shadow possibly get?

Dorian is not the only aspiring psychologist in the novel, though. The craze, for lack of a better term, is actually started by Lord Henry, and, in some readings, Basil. Basil, as we have seen, is perpetually worried about the psychological effect that Lord Henry will have upon the uncorrupted Dorian Gray, but the artist's connection to psychology is more of one affected by disorders such as paranoia than one who actually utilizes the science. Lord Henry, on the other hand, is the consummate psychologist, content to observe his controls and variables, but refusing to take the actions that Dorian eventually does. In fact, it is implied that Dorian's journey into the warped mirror world is at least partially a result of Wotton's careless and impersonal experimentation. Note Wotton's eerily distant thoughts on Dorian early in the novel: "It was clear to him that the experimental method was the only method by which one could arrive at any scientific analysis of the passions; and certainly Dorian Gray was a subject made to his hand, and seemed to promise rich and fruitful results" (63). However, Lord Henry saves himself, or his soul, at least, by always remaining the casual observer. After all, if Wotton acted upon half of his thoughts, Dorian's evil may have been overshadowed by his own. Instead, Wotton lives according to his words, "It has been said that the great events of the world take place in the brain. It is in the brain, and the brain only, that the great sins of the world take place also" (21). Dorian, though, advances past the observant stage to become the subject of his own experiment.

Unfortunately, like his fellow tragic scientist Dr. Frankenstein, Dorian is destroyed when his experiment eventually goes too far, and his monster becomes too

powerful to contain. Dorian's actions throughout the second half of the novel reflect the Victorian notion of decadence gone awry. The idea of decadence dictates that comfort will result from the release of the id. According to thinkers such as Lord Henry, if the id remains locked up, "We degenerate into hideous puppets, haunted by the memory of the passions of which we were too much afraid, and the exquisite temptations that we had not the courage to yield to" (25). Such quasi-Freudian thinking inspires Dorian to unleash his id little by little, until the beast grows too large to recapture. However, the release of the id presents the reader, Victorian or otherwise, with a problem. Oscar Wilde was influenced enough by the philosophers and scientists of the time to argue against the repression of the savage or the id. However, upon the unmitigated release of such a creature, characters like Dorian are destroyed. With this in mind, how can one possibly avoid a visit from the monster in the mirror, the horrific doppelgänger?

Here we have a paradox involving many possible scenarios, all of which Wilde explores. The first, exemplified by aesthetes Sibyl and Basil, involves refusing the doppelgänger's existence altogether, under the misguided assumption that simply refraining from sinful, or even ungentlemanly, actions will lead to happiness. The second is Lord Henry's approach, where the individual recognizes the doppelgänger's existence, and half-heartedly attempts to appease it, but still suppresses the urges of the id. The third approach is one that we have already examined, where the individual both recognizes and acts upon the savagery within with nearly unmitigated fervor. Wilde, though, is not an advocate of any of these scenarios. In an explanation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde once said, "The moral is this: All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment" (qtd. in Nassaar 70-71). The lack of balance in almost all of the novel's

characters, and the destruction that is wreaked upon them, is very telling of Wilde's interpretation of his contemporaries' theories.

While Dorian Gray is arguably the only character in the novel with a doppelgänger, like Dr. Frankenstein's monster, the creature eventually spreads destruction to those surrounding its creator. The "experiment in aesthetic splitting" (McGinn 123) makes short work of Sibyl Vane, who may be its most tragic victim. The death of Basil Hallward carries more of an ethical and psychological lesson, as it is Hallward who represents the early Victorians' refusal to believe in the bestiality of the soul. Basil, as we have already seen, is concerned with outward appearance as much as inward appearance, as is typical for an artist of the period. However, because he subscribes to the Victorian theory of outer beauty representing inner beauty, he suffers from a problem that Lord Henry identifies early in the novel. Lord Henry tells Dorian that "the bravest man amongst us is afraid of himself. The mutilation of the savage has its tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our lives. We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind and poisons us" (20). Of every character in the novel, this concept resounds deepest with Basil. Not only does he feel the need to keep up the appearances of himself and others, but he is also forced to repress his deep emotion for Dorian due to social constructs and restrictions. He is too busy trying to tame his inner savage, and his Victorian mask ultimately suffocates him.

Basil is also a character out of balance. He finds himself too concerned with the concept of beauty to be able to function in the world of reality. In this way, though, he is very much like his contradictory friend Lord Henry. Lord Henry, to some extent also modeled after Pater, is the consummate proponent of decadence and beauty, yet he too is

out of balance, and ultimately destroyed, in a way. Although he is one of few characters still alive at the close of the novel, critic Christopher S. Nassaar argues that Wotton's Victorian persona is destroyed when his wife leaves him. Nassaar argues that while for most of the novel, Wotton attempts to warp and mock the conventions of Victorian life, the tables are eventually turned when his wife performs a very modern act by leaving her husband. Nassaar writes, "Unfortunately for Wotton, the continual process of inverting Victorian values ultimately destroys those values, and Victoria finally commits the very un-Victorian act of eloping" (69). In the end, Wotton has lost both his wife and Dorian Gray. These two individuals whom he had seemingly viewed simply as experiments eventually came to embody the Jungian shadows, or mirror images, of Wotton himself. Lord Henry loved to speak about committing immoral or amoral actions, but Victoria and Dorian are inspired by their creator, for lack of a better term, to act upon these non-Victorian concepts. Ironically, the subjects of Lord Henry's proposed experiments become the purveyors of his proposed, but never acted-upon, theories.

When discussing Wilde's affront to early Victorian societal values, John Paul Riquelme argues that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* "turns out to unleash a destructive, self-destructive savagery antithetical to the principles of civilization itself" (618). Mr. Riquelme's language in this quote is very telling, especially because his phrasing corresponds with many significant lines from the novel itself. Throughout the story, Dorian is faced with the same predicament that Wilde's fellow Victorians were. Over the course of the century, many individuals steadily grew to accept psychological theories of Freud's id, which would later resemble Jung's primitive shadow, but acceptance of scientific theory was often taken with a grain of salt. Despite Dorian's disdain for Lord

Henry's ideas on the primitivism of humanity, Gray eventually gives in to the "animalism in the soul" (Wilde 62), and it can be argued that this animalism is what comes through in the changing portrait. In *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction*, critic Colin McGinn does a thorough job of tracing Dorian's connection with animalism, and Wilde's reliance on the concept of individuals' innate savagery. He first states, "Animals do not go around contributing to the well-being of other animals, unless there is something in it for them [...]. So the hedonistic dispositions of [evil] beings are actually of a sort to be predicted by evolutionary theory" (62). In a sense, McGinn seems to be agreeing with Wotton's thought, "I wonder who it was defined man as a rational animal. It was the most premature definition ever given. Man is many things, but he is not rational" (30). The idea that the monster in Dorian's "mirror" is a force beyond his, or anyone's, control is the concept from which the horror truly stems in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Dorian Gray, the typical Victorian dandy, has a "pleasure in the pain of others [that] is psychologically primitive [...]. He desires the suffering of others as primitively as he desires his own happiness" (McGinn 82). McGinn also claims, "Evil is a natural mystery; its explanation lies too deep in nature for our paltry minds to penetrate" (72-73). This archaic but accurate idea that humans fear what they do not understand holds true in the case of Dorian Gray. Wilde's audience was faced with the idea that horrible, primitive creatures lived inside of each of them, and that each of them was capable of the evil that Dorian Gray perpetrated.

Indeed, no one was exempt from the pressures that this new industrialized and scientific society placed upon the individual. The Victorians established strict molds that they were to fit into, whether physically, professionally, ethically, or otherwise. That said,

it is important to realize the universality of the imposed Victorian persona, and that it did not only affect grown men like Dorian Gray and Dr. Jekyll. In fact, throughout Victorian literature, women, and even children were haunted by mirror monsters as well. One of the most well known victims of such hauntings is, of course, Lewis Carroll's Alice. While by this time it may be redundant or cliché to note that Alice's journeys represent tours of her subconscious mind, the question arises: what kind of little girl possesses subconscious thoughts of child abuse, trials, and beheadings? One could argue that such thoughts are the results of the child being forced to grow up too fast – a concept not entirely foreign in the Victorian Era, or in Victorian literature. The novels of Charles Dickens, for instance, were controversial from the time of their publication for their vivid and disturbing portrayals of children acting as factory workers. Books like *Hard Times* dealt extensively with the forced maturation of Victorian children, while *Great Expectations* exemplified the concept of ascribing “adult” emotions such as love and jealousy to children. With all of the pressures that were placed upon Victorian children, it is no wonder that Alice attempted to escape.

As Dorian Gray was portrayed as the typical Victorian dandy, the title character in *Alice in Wonderland* is depicted as a typical Victorian girl. Tenniel's drawings portray her as very mature-looking, with a lovely dress and a seemingly middle-to-upper class home. While nothing seems to be wrong externally, one gets the immediate sense that she is not unlike Sybil Vane, in that her personality seems rather bland. To be fair, the author does not spend a great deal of time expounding upon any aspect of her personality save for her curiosity before sending her plummeting down the rabbit hole. Once she arrives in Wonderland, though, she is confronted with a number of characters who represent all that

she is not allowed to be as a young Victorian girl. In the world of her psyche, Alice encounters rage (the Queen of Hearts), rudeness (the Caterpillar), and madness (Hatter and Hare). Alice stands in direct opposition to the majority of characters in Wonderland; however, it is not until Alice later visits Looking-Glass Land that she discovers monsters even more horrific than the Queen of Hearts and the abusive Duchess.

It is telling that while a journey through Wonderland is consistently confusing and at times unpleasant, a look in the mirror results in a nightmare that would make most any child, Victorian or otherwise, lose sleep. From the beginning of the sequel, Looking-Glass Land is a foreboding place haunted by notions of jabberwockies, jubjub birds, and bandersnatches. Over the course of the story, we come to discover that the Jabberwocky may, in fact, be the horrific mirror image of Alice herself. After all, it is clear to see that just as the terrifying creature would be most unwelcome in our reality, Alice is an unwanted outsider in Looking-Glass Land. It is easy to pick out many instances of the looking-glass inhabitants' disgust with Alice. Humpty Dumpty and the flowers in the live garden make it a point to tell Alice how unintelligent and ugly she is, and the Red Queen has no qualms about belittling her further.

Perhaps one of the most striking example of how Looking-Glass Alice differs from Real-World Alice comes just before she encounters Tweedledee and Tweedledum. While walking through Carroll's nameless forest, she happens across a Fawn who can identify neither Alice nor itself. Upon exiting the forest, however, the Fawn recognizes Alice as a human child, and flees from her in terror. Whereas Alice had earlier enjoyed the company of her loving kittens, she has now become the Jabberwocky in the tulgey wood of Looking-Glass Land; she has become a monster to be feared and loathed. Her

change from a sweet girl into an unwanted creature is never more evident than in “The Lion and the Unicorn,” during which the Unicorn expresses his shock at seeing a child, which he believed to be nothing more than “fabulous monsters” (Carroll 175). This motif runs throughout the chapter to the extent that Alice eventually concedes that she “was getting quite used to being called ‘the Monster’” (177). Of course, there are moments of sweetness in the book, and not every character regards Alice as a fiend, but by and large, her journey through the looking-glass is one that introduces her to a shadow-self composed of repressed, and monstrous, adulthood.

Whether she is viewed as a monster or not, Alice seems conspicuously out-of-place when interacting with the inhabitants of Looking-Glass Land, most often because of her age. In his study *The Double*, Otto Rank recognized a fear of growing old as “one of the deepest problems of the self” (18). Without doubt, Alice feared this reality of herself so much that she entered a nightmare upon looking into a mirror. As was already mentioned, Victorian children held a peculiar, and often difficult, position in a society that placed great emphasis on appearance, maturity, and responsibility – and this is reflected when Alice looks in the mirror. According to Carrollian critic Nina Auerbach, because Victorian “children were the focus of [...] an extreme conflict of attitudes, they tended to be a source of pain and embarrassment to adults, and were therefore told they should be ‘seen and not heard’” (343). In their respective essays, Auerbach and her colleague Peter Coveney go on to identify a particular group of Victorian authors, the most prominent being Carroll, who not only sympathized with the childhood condition, but sought ways to escape the shadows of even their own adulthood. In their means to

achieve this end, however, Coveney argues that they merely offered further polarization, and thus, led to the continued strengthening of the shadow self.

Speaking of Lewis Carroll and his compatriots, Coveney writes, “their interest in childhood serves not to integrate childhood and adult experiences, but to create a barrier of nostalgia and regret between childhood and the potential responses of adult life” (327). If one views Alice’s “real” life as one of childhood, and her life through the looking-glass as adulthood, the sense of nostalgia and regret of which Coveney speaks becomes quite evident. When *Through the Looking-Glass* opens, we are treated to a lengthy scene of childhood frivolity. Alice plays with her kittens in a room bereft of any adult presence, save for a passing reference to her nanny. There are no rules except for those that Alice imposes upon her kittens, and even those are stated in the playful and simple manner expected of a child. While the rules are unremarkable, the consequence should her kittens break them is significant. During this opening scene, Alice threatens Kitty with punishment by placing her in the looking-glass house (Carroll 110). Immediately, one gets the sense that being sent to the looking-glass house is the equivalent of being sent to bed without dinner. While Alice later expresses an interest as to what actually goes on in the looking-glass house, Carroll has already established it as a place where only disobedient kittens, and perhaps children, deserve to be sent. Carroll anticipates the regret that Alice will feel if she rushes into adulthood, and provides her with a violent and disturbing lesson to dissuade her from doing so. From the moment that Alice steps foot in the looking-glass house, the mirror world provides nothing but violence, confusion, and misunderstanding. Ironically, by the time that she travels through the squares required to make herself a queen, she is so disillusioned by adulthood that she shakes the Red Queen

into submission, forcing her world to revert to the relative normalcy of childhood. Peter Coveney believes that by this point, Carroll's "awareness of childhood is no longer an interest in growth and integration [...] but a means of detachment and retreat from the adult world" (328). Alice's hasty retreat from the characters who compose her mirror image, her latent adult, certainly contributes to this theory.

Indeed, Carroll's heavy-handed elimination of any sense of childhood from Looking-Glass Land is enough to push even a proper young girl like Alice to her limit. In this land of her imagination, for instance, the childhood frivolity and pettiness personified by the Tweedles are violently disposed of by a monstrous crow. At the same time, nearly every adult that Alice meets is seemingly either at or reaching the end of his or her life. The Red Queen moves through life too quickly, while the White Queen, White Knight, and even the Wasp from Carroll's excluded chapter show signs of not only old age, but senility as well. Where does this leave Alice? Strangely enough, in Victorian society, Alice may have had more in common with her mirror self, the Jabberwocky, than any other character whom she encountered on her journeys. The Wonderland and Looking-Glass Land characters not only reprimand her at an alarming rate, but often make her look and feel as though she is an evil presence in their land. Like Dorian Gray, the society around her has made her feel as though she must suppress a major part of herself to conform to its rules. The problem lies in the fact that the more pressure Victorian society placed upon such characters, the more likely it was that mirror selves, doppelgangers, and Jabberwockys would rear their heads and cause both literal and figurative nightmares.

Critic Christopher Nassaar claims that Dorian Gray's portrait serves as a "mirror to [the] soul" (56) – one that helped begin quite an extensive history of similar reflective imagery. Just as the literature of the Victorian Era evolved into contemporary stories of mirror monsters, so also did Victorian psychology evolve into a field of unprecedented study. In fact, the two disciplines have grown together, and have continuously influenced and fed off of each other. What Oscar Wilde and Lewis Carroll are to today's writers and filmmakers, Sigmund Freud was to Carl Gustav Jung, whose name has become synonymous with the psychology of mirrors, and who expressed a keen interest in the psychology of fairy tales and folklore. While Freud initially unnerved his Victorian audience with tales of the hidden id, Jung, his pupil, reiterated the concept that all individuals possess the potential to become the next Dorian Gray or Mr. Hyde.

In his writings on dream analysis, Jung proposes a simple theory: that psychological well-being depends upon what he referred to as the primitive unconscious being assimilated with the conscious, allowing humans to achieve the kind of balance of which Oscar Wilde had previously spoken. Interestingly, the public reaction to Jung's analysis in 1933 was strikingly similar to the reaction that Freud's audience had to the concept of the ego and the id. Jung himself writes, "I was recently reproached with the charge that my teaching about the assimilation of the unconscious, were it accepted, would undermine culture and exalt primitivity at the cost of our highest values" (*Modern Man...* 16). Perhaps the fear that Jung mentioned is simply a byproduct of the psychoanalyst's semantics. In *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Jung devotes a great deal of time to the definition and analysis of the archaic or primitive man. This unreasonable and superstitious man, Jung argues, is a part of each of us, though we may be hesitant to

acknowledge his existence. “Primitive” is a loaded word, whether in Victorian or contemporary society, and it certainly does not carry a positive connotation. Jung’s detractors who so feared the release of the unconscious surely envisioned primitive actions similar to those of Dorian Gray or the Jabberwocky. Despite Jung’s best efforts to the contrary, though, it seems that his analysis of the unconscious only served to instill more trepidation in the minds of his audience, and to validate the fears that the Victorian Age had created. What were Dorian Gray, Mr. Hyde, the Jabberwocky, and Dracula if not primitive? Each lived for sensory experiences alone, and desired only the most primal of sensations: power, violence, and sex, to name a few. As we will see, contemporary tales also warn their audiences to take heed of Jung’s suggestions, but continue to play on the concern that any release of the unconscious will result in primal actions and dire consequences.

With the constant progression of psychiatric analysis since the time of Wilde and Carroll, is it any surprise that malevolent creatures continue to haunt our mirrors today? Just as legendary monsters like vampires and werewolves are often seen as the personifications of primal and universal fears, the *doppelgänger* carries more meaning than the typical contemporary horror film villain. Today, as in Victorian times, the victims of mirror monsters fit into a specific category – they are all unsure of themselves, often due to immense pressure from the society in which they live. We can see this in the parallel of Gray’s Portrait and Alice’s Jabberwocky with two infamous legends of contemporary popular culture: Bloody Mary and the Candyman.

The legend of Bloody Mary is far less pleasant than the drink of the same name. Traditionally, in order to invoke the vengeful spirit of Bloody Mary, young people (often

girls) repeat a version of her name a number of times into a mirror. As a result, Mary will allegedly appear to the unfortunate victim. None who have written on the subject can say for certain where the terrifying folk legend of Bloody Mary originated. Historians have argued that Bloody Mary refers to England's Queen Mary I, who was infamous for her persecution of Protestants during her sixteenth century reign. As folklorist Alan Dundes notes, Mary I is often confused with Mary Queen of Scots in Bloody Mary origin stories, though this explanation would make less sense (Dundes 85). A third suspect is Elizabeth Bathory, the ill-famed Hungarian Blood Countess who notoriously murdered countless serving girls and reportedly bathed in their blood. Most historians accept an amalgamation of these origins when analyzing the Bloody Mary ritual, which also changes depending upon time and culture. In 1996, Dundes organized a study during which a number of college-aged students related the versions of the Bloody Mary legend that they had heard as children. Some versions required the summoner to spin around while repeating Mary's name, some required a drop of blood to be drawn from the summoner's finger, and one even required flushing the toilet as a means to drive off the evil spirit once it appears. While each of the rituals differed in a number of ways, Dundes' noted that they all had one thing in common: they all called for the use of a mirror.

Prior to Dundes's study, a researcher named Janet Langlois proposed the idea that the image of Bloody Mary was in fact a kind of self-image that young girls found horrifying. Following his own experiment, Dundes concluded that the "consistent utilization of a mirror in the Bloody Mary ritual confirms Langlois's intuition that the image is in some sense a self-image" (86), but he takes this thesis a step further. He

argues that the reason for the persistent presence of blood, toilets, and bathroom mirrors in the legend denotes a culturally instilled fear of menstruation in young girls. Despite society's very gradual acceptance of such topics of discussion, periods remain a taboo subject among young girls who fear the embarrassment and possible ridicule that can often result from the natural process. This, of course, lends once more to the concept that the monster in the mirror is a personification of societal taboo and cultural repression. As interesting as this theory is, though, its relevance to this thesis also stems from how old the girls were when they first heard the story of Bloody Mary. In fact, most seemed to be of the age that Alice was when she entered Looking-Glass Land. Is this merely coincidental, or can girls simply be expected to experience the horror of mirror monsters at this age?

Before answering these questions, and without calling the validity of Dundes's study into question, one must remember that his research was comprised entirely of female contributors, as he acted under the assumption that young girls have the strongest belief in mirror monsters. Dundes does, though, raise a very important point when he quotes cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead, who once wrote, "The girl's first menstruation marks a dividing-line between childhood and womanhood" (qtd. in Dundes 84). Perhaps Bloody Mary is actually the consummate adult, giving the frightening impression that all things childish will soon be gone. Folklorist Elizabeth Tucker seems to think that this is the case. In her extensive study, "Ghosts in Mirrors: Reflection of the Self," Tucker also gathers stories from college students, but this time, they do not relate tales that they knew as young children, but rather ghost stories that they currently believe to be true (Tucker 187-188). Tucker's students are no longer twelve-year-old girls, but

young men and women who are about to enter the adult world of careers, marriages, mortgages, and student loan payments. They, like Alice and the girls from Dundes's study, stand at the threshold of a new world, and they, like Dorian Gray, are desperate to conform to what this new world will demand of them.

In the 1992 horror film, *Candyman*, adapted from a short story by British horror scribe Clive Barker, Virginia Madsen portrays another student who develops a fascination with a horrific denizen of the Looking-Glass Land. Here again, the character who summons the evil mirror monster is one who suffers under society's taboos and restrictions. A quick character study of will show that Madsen's character, Helen Lyle, is very much like a modern-day Alice, made to feel out-of-place and unwanted, and haunted by a metaphorical Jabberwocky of her own. When we meet Helen, she is a graduate student in the midst of performing research on modern folklore. The characters that surround her include her husband, her best friend, and a legendary figure known as the Candyman, who is rumored to be summoned in a Bloody Mary-like fashion. While the beginning of the film leads the viewer to believe that the Candyman and Helen will be nothing more than hunter and prey, it is not long before one begins to realize that the two characters are actually kindred spirits who share the bond of forced repression. The Candyman's repression is obvious. In life, he was the wealthy son of a slave who impregnated a young white woman. Disgusted and angered at this notion, the townspeople had him killed in an atrocious fashion: they sawed off his right hand, bound him, poured honey over him, opened a nearby apiary, and left him to die in the hot sun as swarms of bees engulfed his body. Finally, they burned his body on a pyre. I mention this form of death as an interesting side note, since Elizabeth Bathory was also reported to

have tortured her victims by covering them with honey and releasing bees upon them centuries earlier. Whether the filmmakers were employing a clever nod to the Bloody Mary legend is unknown, but the coincidence is striking, if not eerie.

Helen herself is tortured throughout the movie, but not initially by the Candyman. As a student of modern folklore, she is already destined to be isolated within the educational system, but as a woman, her plight is shown to be that much worse. One particularly wrenching scene in the film shows Helen being mercilessly mocked by her professor husband and his colleagues, who seem to represent the boys' club to which Helen simply will not be allowed entry. Despite the astuteness of her observations and validity of her claims, she is nonetheless treated as a second-rate hack who has no place in the field. One man in particular, Professor Purcell, mockingly belittles Helen for attempting to publish an original study on the Candyman, claiming that he has already done so. Purcell commends Helen on her beauty, but scoffs at her attempts to bring anything new to the field. The elder professors seem genuinely taken off guard to find a female academic in 1992 who is not avidly pursuing a feminist agenda.

Helen's inability to leave the traditional female role extends to her home life as well. Here, she is so enwrapped in her studies that her husband finds her undesirable, and opts to pursue flirtations with his young students. In fact, the seriousness of this situation becomes more apparent after Helen's eventual death (in a fire reminiscent of that in which the Candyman himself was burned), when the viewer sees that Trevor Lyle has wasted little time in finding a replacement for Helen. His new significant other is younger, cuter, perkier, and in general, what many would view as "girlier" (i.e. she insists on repainting the apartment a bright pink, which Trevor gladly agrees to, embracing her

overt femininity). Helen, like Alice, is not able to fit in anywhere, and her natural curiosity only leads to further ostracism. For instance, when Helen travels to Chicago's Cabrini Green, the site of the original Candyman murders, those who live in the tenements where bizarre occurrences have been recorded refuse to cooperate with her. While the inhabitants of Wonderland and Looking-Glass Land offer rudeness due to ageism, those who live in the slums that Helen visits issue threats based on racism. Helen is a middle-class, educated, Caucasian woman. Because of this, those whom she encounters in the slums give her as much credence as Humpty Dumpty gave Alice.

It is no wonder, then, that Helen finds her shadow self in the mysterious and deadly Candyman. Elizabeth Tucker, applying a Jungian approach to Helen's situation, contends, "although he seems to be Helen's animus, a demonic lover, he could also be described as a representation of her shadow: the part of herself that does everything forbidden by society" (197). She goes on to list the many ways in which the Candyman may be viewed as Helen's shadowy mirror image: "Candyman is black, passionate, male; Helen [is] white, rather reserved, and female" (197). The connection between Helen and the Candyman is more than a series of direct oppositions. Over the course of the film, it becomes apparent that only Helen can see the Candyman. Also, in at least one scene, the Candyman's voice is heard in Helen's thoughts as he claims, "They will all abandon you," and continues to plead with her to "become one" with him. For this essay's purposes, the scene's importance is two-fold. First, the Candyman's overtly sexual and seductive nature plays to Jung's concept of the primitive man. Perhaps more importantly, though, the Candyman's desire to become one with Helen clearly establishes him as her

shadow self, and suggests to the viewer that Helen's apparent madness may only be cured by the reconciliation of her consciousness and her mirror monster.

Helen and the Candyman are two sides of the same coin, much like Alice and the Jabberwocky. Each heroine looks into the mirror to see a terrifying beast that was slain because it simply could not be allowed to exist by those who govern society. However, shortly thereafter, each heroine subsequently *becomes* the terrifying interloper who gets in over her head and is placed in a similar situation as their shadow selves (though Alice is not killed, note that her fate would have been identical to that of the Jabberwocky had the Queen of Hearts brought her plans to fruition). It is clear that the cultures in which Alice and Helen live are quite similar, in that they do not allow these women to live the balanced lives that people such as Jung and Wilde felt to be so important. Alice is unable to reconcile childhood and adulthood, just as Helen is unable to reconcile the life of a professional academic with the life of a feminine wife. Ultimately, this forced division gives rise to antagonists from their own psyches, and compels them to confront their own distorted reflections.

As the Victorian Era progressed from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, a need for balance between good and evil, light and dark, and even science and literature, was needed to restore a peace of mind that had been shaken by new discoveries, theories, and ways of life. Nassaar dramatizes this idea when he writes, "[T]he Victorians are now deep in the demon universe, and unless they maintain a balance between good and evil, renunciation and excess, they will be destroyed" (71). This need for balance was often fulfilled by images of duality in Victorian literature. These stories of duality acted as parables, teaching readers that they must accept their

“other” sides rather than suppressing them or viewing them as totally separate beings.

Wilde and Carroll anticipated a theory that Jung would soon after put forth, stating that the self “is absolutely paradoxical in that it represents in every respect thesis and antithesis, and at the same time synthesis” (*Jung on Evil* 27). It is only when this synthesis occurs that the individual can become stable and whole.

Dorian Gray acts as Oscar Wilde’s warning against both extreme repression and extreme decadence. The character, as well as those characters that surround him, feels the need to constantly make decisions. He finds himself choosing between angelic purity and demonic sinfulness, art and reality, restraint and reflex. It is this socially-imposed need to choose exclusively between a world of dark and light that ultimately leads to Dorian’s downfall. Colin McGinn sums up Dorian’s predicament, saying that “[...] in one life he is beautiful, graceful, and charming; in another he is grotesque, violent, and repulsive [...] In this respect he dramatizes the common human condition: we must all live a dual aesthetic life” (142). The problem lies in Dorian’s perception, which was influenced by thinkers such as Lord Henry. Dorian sees his portrait as “a visible symbol of the degradation of sin” (100) rather than as a part of himself. He sees it as a punishment, and thus it becomes one. It is the fact that Dorian has banished his savagery, his id, and his guilt, to another body that makes him half the man he should be, so to speak. Had Dorian embraced his darker side, yet balanced it with the goodness that Basil saw in him, one may safely conjecture that Dorian’s fate would have been a bit more favorable.

As Riquelme states, the “‘Doppelgänger,’ or ‘double life,’ [is] central to Wilde’s narrative” (613). The Victorian Age brought readers beyond the horror tropes of Walpole and Radcliffe. Audiences no longer feared ghostly knights or evil monks. The new fear

was of the self, and this paranoia was brought on largely through the studies and writings of such intrepid thinkers as Freud and Jung. Victorian literature reflected a time of lost faith, antiquated truths, and unsettling discoveries. The soul became the unknowable mainly because many refused to know it, and based upon the vanity and superficiality of the age, the mirror became the perfect window to the Victorian soul. Before ultimately attempting to destroy his doppelgänger, Dorian Gray makes one more attempt to analyze the portrait. He considers the painting “[...] an unjust mirror, this mirror of his soul that he was looking at” (Wilde 228). Appropriately, Dorian is half-correct. The painting is indeed a mirror, but it is also quite just. The trickery of the monster in the mirror is that it is not a monster at all. When characters such as Dorian Gray look at their reflections, they see the truth that they have banished there. Alice goes through the looking-glass and sees the truth: she will have to grow up and face miserable adults like the Red Queen and Humpty Dumpty. When Dracula looks into the mirror, he sees the truth: he has no soul at all. More recently, when those who killed the Candyman look into the mirror, they see their victim, a reflection of their own conscience. Regardless of whether the doppelgänger is identical to the subject or not, the mirror, since Victorian times, has accurately reflected the workings of the mind, the soul, the conscience, the id, the shadow – in general, the unseen and repressed. According to Jung’s *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, “Although insight into the problem of opposites is absolutely imperative, there are very few people who can stand it in practice” (28). It is this soul-searching acceptance of mirror images that frightened the Victorian audience, and it is the shadow that continues to haunt many today.

The Victorian Era remains an age that people point to when asked to give an example of repression. During the time that Stevenson, Carroll, and Wilde were writing, their society identified a number of taboos, including drug culture, racism, anti-Semitism, evolutionism, homosexuality (or, for that matter, *any* sexuality), and the general impropriety that such characters as Basil Hallward denounced. With that said, perhaps anyone claiming that today's culture is more open-minded should turn on the evening news. After all, Otto Rank's claim from decades ago still rings true: "These superstitious notions and fears of modern civilized nations concerning the shadow have their counterpart in numerous and widespread prohibitions (taboos)" (Rank 51). What do we see in our society but the very same taboos that existed over one hundred years ago? The contemporary era certainly owes a debt to the Victorians, but we must also realize that have also inherited the mirror monster that will not die. For as long as society has taboo and repression, this trope of the Victorian authors will continue to show itself in popular culture, whether in the form of literature, folklore, or film. When faced with the inescapable realities of Darwin, Freud, and their colleagues, the Victorian authors recognized their audience's lack of preparation and acceptance. In an effort to teach the masses to reconcile themselves to the mirror monsters and strive for a healthy balance between light and dark, propriety and frivolity, they created a slew of horrific beings, from Dracula and Mr. Hyde to Gray's portrait and the Jabberwocky.

But how could they have known the power and persistence of social taboos? If anything, these fears have become more universal over time, which no doubt accounts for international prevalence of the bloody Mary Legend and the worldwide success of such films as *Candyman*. Alan Dundes connects Victorian and post-Victorian psychology to

these tales when he writes, "Folklore as a socially sanctioned outlet to permit individuals to do what is normally not permitted by society, superego, conscience, normative morality, and the like often needs the guise or disguise of fantasy. This is why it is so often taboo topics which inspire the creation of folklore" (90). Throughout this analysis, we have seen how Victorian authors, modern folklorists, and contemporary filmmakers have repeatedly relied upon the mirror image to express the dangers of social pressures, repression, and taboo. The fact that folklore based upon the same topics as novels from over a century ago continue to be mainstays in popular culture tells us that our current society is not all that different from the Victorian Era. Although we often pride ourselves on the great strides made since the nineteenth century, the shadow of taboo continues to linger in our culture. As Wilde and Carroll originally proposed, taboo breeds repression, which, in turn, begets madness and violence. Psychologists have agreed with this theory since Freud first introduced the concept of the id, but as Jung wrote, recognizing the id or the shadow is a far cry from accepting it and making it an active, if restrained, part of one's self. It appears that for as long as there is taboo, and as long as fears exist about the concepts of race, age, sexuality, and propriety, individuals – especially young people – will continue to be haunted by the Victorian monster in the mirror.

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